



Book review: Jonathan S. Marion, Jerome W. Crowder (2013), Visual Research. A Concise Introduction to Thinking Visually. London, New York, Bloomsbury
Gilles de Rapper

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Marion, Jonathan M. and Jerome W. Crowder. 2013. *Visual Research. A Concise Introduction to Thinking Visually*. London, New Delhi, New York: Bloomsbury. xvii + 192 pp. Pb.: £19.99. ISBN: 9780857852069.

Visual Research is a short and practical introduction to the use of images in social sciences. Although the book is not exclusively designed for anthropologists, it refers to anthropological case studies and literature, and will be of interest to all anthropologists. The aim of the authors, both involved in the Society for Visual Anthropology (a section of the American Anthropological Association), is to give an overview of key concepts and issues related to visual research and to provide guidelines for the making and use of images in the social sciences. The book comes out at a time when handheld devices and online technologies are becoming extremely popular – so much so that most of us are using them in our research. At the same time, the vast amount of images we can produce and their rapid and uncontrolled dissemination on the Internet can become problematic when conducting research. The argument of the authors is that before actually engaging in visual research (making images and using them), we should learn to “think visually” – that is to ask the right questions to the images and to be aware of what is at stake when taking a picture or a video and when publishing it.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, *Image basics*, introduces ‘fundamental ideas involved in thinking visually’ (p. xv). It begins with a strong emphasis on the ethics of images (Chapter 1). As the authors suggest, general ethical principles in social sciences involve specific considerations when working with visual material and data, which they call “visual ethics”. The next chapter, *Starting to think visually*, introduces the notion of “visual literacy” and calls for a better understanding by researchers of the link between the making and use of images and ethnographic knowledge. It also introduces basic vocabulary of image reading and interpretation. Chapter 3 goes further by outlining the necessity to consider images not only as illustrations but also as ‘data in their own right’ (p. 28). As such, images, along with but different from text, allow to ask and answer research questions. The second section, *Making images* starts with a historical overview of the use of camera in social sciences (Chapter 4) and then turns to three different techniques of making images: photography (Chapter 5), video (Chapter 6) and multimedia (Chapter 7). For each of these techniques, the authors give basic practical knowledge and guidelines, and describe the way they contribute, each in a different manner, to the production of ethnographic understanding. The third and final section of the book, *Using images*, is dedicated to the organisation and storage of images (Chapter 8), to their exploration through indexation and use of metadata (Chapter 9) and finally to their inclusion in research products (Chapter 10). All chapters are illustrated by case studies written by specialists of various disciplines (anthropology, sociology, archaeology, etc.). A glossary, a list of online resources, an index and an abundant bibliography complete the book.

The book is written in a didactic style and sometimes seems to continuously repeat the same basic or common sense recommendations (backup your files, think well before taking a picture, do not insert too much text in a PowerPoint presentation) but it is

comprehensive and full of practical suggestions directly related to the authors' experience and own mistakes. In that sense, it should not be recommended only to those who intend to engage in visual research. As the authors correctly emphasise, we all use images, either as material, or as a tool for elicitation, as illustration in our articles and presentations, and as a way to keep contact with the people with whom we work. Knowing how to make the right picture for a specific aim, how to store and organise the pictures, how to explore and interpret them, how to use and disseminate them, has become a common and everyday concern for most anthropologists.

With its emphasis on most recent digital and online technologies – which makes it easier for all of us to produce, store and use images – the book represents an up-to-date introduction to visual research. Given the rapid development of those technologies, some parts of the book will probably quickly become out-dated (especially regarding storage and archiving), but it comes at the right time, and its emphasis on the importance of thinking visually before engaging in visual research will probably remain invaluable.

GILLES DE RAPPER
CNRS, IDEMEC, Aix-en-Provence (France)